

## Introduction – Background

At the time in India, there was a widespread belief in karma & rebirth

The practice of going forth was common, and widely respected & supported. Aim was to find an end to the cycle of rebirth

3 kinds of spiritual seekers (samaṇas) samatha practitioners – deep meditation – attain a state beyond sensory worlds & heavens; ascetic practitioners – burn off old karma by inaction, or by disciplining/tormenting body-mind – annihilation of the self; philosophers & debaters – figure out a solution

Buddha-to-be tried samatha as practiced for its own sake under 2 teachers; then extreme ascetic practices with 5 companions; saw that neither offered a real solution. Then used samatha as a stepping stone to peace & clarity of mind to see through the illusion of a self – and realized this was the final solution.

## MN26: Ariyapariyesanā - The Noble Search

...I attained the supreme security from bondage, Nibbāna. The penetration by insight arose in me: ‘This liberation of mind is unshakable. This is the last birth. Now there is no more renewed existence.’

Disinclined to teach the Dhamma

I considered: ‘This Dhamma that has been awakened to is profound, hard to see and hard to understand, peaceful and sublime, unattainable by mere reasoning, subtle, to be experienced by the wise. But this generation delights in self-identity, takes delight in self-affirmation, and rejoices in selfhood. It is hard for such a generation to see this truth, namely, it’s all an empty process of cause and effect, dependent origination and cessation.

‘Furthermore, it is hard to embrace this goal, namely, the stilling and disappearance of the will, the relinquishing of everything that has been acquired, the destruction of wanting, everything fading away, cessation, Nibbāna.

‘If I were to teach the Dhamma, others would not understand me, and that would be wearying and troublesome for me.’

Thereupon there came to me spontaneously these verses never heard before:

‘Enough with teaching the Dhamma. That even I found hard to reach. For it will never be perceived. By those who live in wanting and negativity.

Those stained with wanting. Wrapped in darkness. Will never discern this profound Dhamma. Which goes against the worldly stream. Subtle, deep, and difficult to see.’

Considering thus, my mind inclined to inaction rather than to teaching the Dhamma.

## Request to teach the Dhamma

Then the Brahmā Sahampati knew with his mind the thought in my mind and he lamented: ‘The world will be lost, the world will perish, since the mind of the Tathāgata, awakened and fully enlightened, inclines to inaction rather than to teaching the Dhamma.’

Then, just as quickly as a strong man might extend his flexed arm or flex his extended arm, the Brahmā Sahampati vanished from the Brahma-world and appeared before me. He arranged his upper robe on one shoulder, and extending his hands in añjali towards me, said: ‘Venerable sir, let the Blessed One teach the Dhamma, let the Sublime One teach the Dhamma. There are beings

with little dust in their eyes who are wasting through not hearing the Dhamma. There will be those who will understand the Dhamma.’

...

Then I listened to the Brahmā's pleading, and out of compassion for beings I surveyed the world with the eye of a Buddha. I saw beings with little dust in their eyes and with much dust in their eyes, with keen faculties and with dull faculties, with good qualities and with bad qualities, easy to teach and hard to teach, and some who dwelt seeing fear and danger in future lives.

Then I replied to the Brahmā Sahampati in verse:

‘Open for them are the doors to Freedom from Dying. Let those with ears to hear now show their faith. Thinking it would be troublesome, O Brahmā, I did not speak the Dhamma, subtle and sublime.’

Then the Brahmā Sahampati understood: ‘The Buddha has consented to my request that he teach the Dhamma.’ And after paying homage to me, keeping me on the right, he departed.

### Whom to teach?

I considered: ‘To whom should I first teach this Dhamma? Who will understand this Dhamma quickly?’ Then it occurred to me: ‘Ālāra Kālāma is wise, intelligent, and discerning; he has long had little dust in his eyes. Suppose I taught the Dhamma first to Ālāra Kālāma. He will understand it quickly.’ Then devas approached me and said: ‘Venerable sir, Ālāra Kālāma died seven days ago.’ And I knew it was so. I thought: ‘Ālāra Kālāma has suffered a great loss. If he had heard this Dhamma, he would have understood it quickly.’

I considered: ‘To whom should I first teach this Dhamma? Who will understand this Dhamma quickly?’ Then it occurred to me: ‘Uddaka Rāmaputta is wise, intelligent, and discerning; he has long had little dust in his eyes. Suppose I taught the Dhamma first to Uddaka Rāmaputta. He will understand it quickly.’ Then devas approached me and said: ‘Venerable sir, Uddaka Rāmaputta died last night.’ And I knew it was so. I thought: ‘Uddaka Rāmaputta has suffered a great loss. If he had heard this Dhamma, he would have understood it quickly.’

I considered: ‘To whom should I first teach this Dhamma? Who will understand this Dhamma quickly?’ Then it occurred to me: ‘The group of five bhikkhus who attended upon me while I was engaged in striving were very helpful. Suppose I taught the Dhamma first to them.’ Then I thought: ‘Where are that group of five bhikkhus now living?’ And with the divine eye, I saw that they were living at Benares in the Deer Park at Isipatana.

#### First Opportunity to teach

Then when I had stayed at Uruvelā as long as I chose, I set out to wander by stages to Benares. As I travelled between the Bodhi Tree and Gayā, the Ājīvaka Upaka saw me on the road and said: ‘Friend, you look radiant, happy, and peaceful. Under whom have you gone forth? Who is your teacher? Whose Dhamma do you profess?’

I replied to the Ājīvaka Upaka in verse:

‘I am one who has transcended all. A knower of all. Unsullied among all things, renouncing all. Freed by the ceasing of wanting. Having known this all for myself. To whom should I point as teacher?’

I have no teacher, and one like me exists nowhere in all this world. Or in the heavens, because I have no person for my counterpart.

I am the Awakened One in the world. I am the Teacher Supreme. I alone am a Fully

Enlightened One<sup>[L][SEP]</sup> Whose fires are quenched and extinguished.

I go now to the city of Kāśī<sup>[L][SEP]</sup> To set in motion the Wheel of Dhamma.<sup>[L][SEP]</sup> In a world that has become blind<sup>[L][SEP]</sup> I go to beat the drum of Freedom from Dying.’

The Ājīvaka Upaka said: ‘By your claims, friend, you ought to be the Universal Victor.’ And the Buddha answered:

‘The real victors are those like me<sup>[L][SEP]</sup> Who have won to destruction<sup>[L][SEP]</sup> Of the outflowings of the mind.<sup>[L][SEP]</sup> I have vanquished all bad states;<sup>[L][SEP]</sup> Therefore, Upaka, I am a victor.’

When this was said, the Ājīvaka Upaka said: ‘May it be so, friend.’ Shaking his head, he took a bypath and departed.

## Second Attempt to teach

Then, wandering by stages, I eventually came to Benares, to the Deer Park at Isipatana, and I approached the group of five bhikkhus. The bhikkhus saw me coming in the distance, and they agreed among themselves: ‘Friends, here comes that seeker Gotama who lives luxuriously, who gave up his striving, and reverted to luxury. We should not pay homage to him or rise up for him or receive his bowl and outer robe. But a seat may be prepared for him. If he likes, he may sit down.’

However, as I approached, those bhikkhus found themselves unable to keep their pact. One came to meet me and took my bowl and outer robe, another prepared a seat, and another set out water for washing my feet; however, they addressed me as ‘Friend Gotama’.

Therefore I told them: ‘Bhikkhus, do not address the Tathāgata by name and as "friend." The Tathāgata is an Awakened One, a Fully Enlightened One.<sup>[L][SEP]</sup> Listen, bhikkhus, Freedom from Dying has been attained. I shall instruct you, I shall teach you the Dhamma. Practising as you are instructed, by realizing directly for yourselves in this very life, you will soon reach that supreme goal of the holy life for the sake of which seekers rightly go forth from the home life into the spiritual search.’

The group of five bhikkhus answered me: ‘Friend Gotama, by the conduct, the practice, and the performance of austerities that you undertook while you were practicing with us, you did not achieve any superhuman states, any penetration by insight worthy of a noble one. Since you now live luxuriously, having given up your striving and reverted to luxury, how will you now have achieved any superhuman states, any penetration by insight worthy of a noble one?’

I told them: ‘The Tathāgata does not live luxuriously, nor has he given up his striving and reverted to luxury. The Tathāgata is an Awakened One, a Fully Enlightened One.<sup>[L][SEP]</sup> Listen, bhikkhus, Freedom from Dying has been attained. I shall instruct you, I shall teach you the Dhamma. Practising as you are instructed, by realizing directly for yourselves in this very life, you will soon reach that supreme goal of the holy life for the sake of which seekers rightly go forth from the home life into the spiritual search.’

A second time the group of five bhikkhus said to me: ‘Friend Gotama, by the conduct, the practice, and the performance of austerities that you undertook while you were practicing with us, you did not achieve any superhuman states, any penetration by insight worthy of a noble one. Since you now live luxuriously, having given up your striving and reverted to luxury, how will you now have achieved any superhuman states, any penetration by insight worthy of a noble one?’

A second time I told them: ‘The Tathāgata does not live luxuriously, nor has he given up his striving and reverted to luxury. The Tathāgata is an Awakened One, a Fully Enlightened

One.<sup>[1]</sup> Listen, bhikkhus, Freedom from Dying has been attained. I shall instruct you, I shall teach you the Dhamma. Practising as you are instructed, by realizing directly for yourselves in this very life, you will soon reach that supreme goal of the holy life for the sake of which seekers rightly go forth from the home life into the spiritual search.’

A third time the group of five bhikkhus said to me: ‘Friend Gotama, by the conduct, the practice, and the performance of austerities that you undertook while you were practicing with us, you did not achieve any superhuman states, any penetration by insight worthy of a noble one. Since you now live luxuriously, having given up your striving and reverted to luxury, how will you now have achieved any superhuman states, any penetration by insight worthy of a noble one?’

(reflect on asking 3x, accepting 3rd refusal; glad the Buddha persisted!)

An Opening to teach the Dhamma

So, changing my approach, I asked them: ‘Bhikkhus, have you ever known me to speak like this before?’<sup>[1]</sup> ‘No, venerable sir,’ they replied. (NB ‘Bhante’, a respectful address)

And so I was able to convince the group of five bhikkhus.

‘Bhikkhus, the Tathāgata is an Awakened One, a Fully Enlightened One.<sup>[1]</sup> Listen, bhikkhus, Freedom from Dying has been attained. I shall instruct you, I shall teach you the Dhamma. Practising as you are instructed, by realizing for yourselves in this very life through direct knowledge, you will soon reach that supreme goal of the holy life for the sake of which seekers rightly go forth from the home life into the spiritual search.’

## **Saṃyutta Nikāya 56:11<sup>[1]</sup> Chapter 56 on the Noble Truths:<sup>[1]</sup> Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma**

### **The Middle Way**

Bhikkhus, these two extremes should not be followed by one who has gone forth as a seeker: devotion to pursuit of pleasure in the 5 senses & luxurious living – which is low, coarse, vulgar, not noble, and not connected with the goal; and devotion to wearing out the self by wearing down (wearying) the body-mind – which is painful, not noble, and not connected with the goal. Avoiding these two extremes, the Tathāgata has awakened to the middle way, which gives rise to insight, gives rise to penetration, which leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna.

And what is that middle way awakened to by the Tathāgata, which gives rise to insight, gives rise to penetration, which leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna?<sup>[1]</sup> It is this Noble Eightfold Path: Right View, Right Motivation, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Endeavor, Right Mindfulness, and Right Stillness.

Right View = The Four Noble Truths

**DN12** ‘It is through not fully understanding and penetrating the Four Noble Truths that I, as well as you, have experienced the cycle of rebirth-and-death for a very long time.’

(for each truth, 3 phases: knowing what it is – information;<sup>[1]</sup> knowing what to do about it – our duty towards it;<sup>[1]</sup> and knowing that the duty has been completed.)

Now this is the Noble Truth of suffering: rebirth is suffering, old age is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering; experiencing what is unpleasant is suffering; missing what is pleasing is suffering; not getting what you think you want is suffering; in summary, the five components of existence (khandhas), acting as fuel for each other, are suffering.<sup>[1]</sup> What should we do about it? ‘Suffering is to be fully understood.’<sup>[1]</sup> The Buddha could say: ‘Suffering has been fully understood.’

Now this is the Noble Truth of the origin of suffering: it is this wanting which leads to rebirth,

accompanied by enjoyment and desire, always seeking delight here and there; that is, wanting sensory experience, wanting to be (existence), wanting annihilation (to get rid of things).<sup>[1]</sup>What should we do about it? 'Wanting – the origin of suffering – is to be abandoned.'<sup>[2]</sup>The Buddha could say: 'Wanting – the origin of suffering – has been abandoned.'

Now this is the Noble Truth of the cessation of suffering: it is the remainderless fading away and cessation of that same wanting: giving it up, dropping it, freedom from wanting, not giving it a foothold (or, sensory experience leaves no residue).<sup>[3]</sup>What should we do about it? 'The end of wanting – the cessation of suffering – is to be realized.'<sup>[4]</sup>The Buddha could say: 'The end of wanting – the cessation of suffering – has been realized.'

Now this is the Noble Truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering: it is the Noble Eightfold Path, that is, Right View, Right Motivation, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Endeavor, Right Mindfulness, and Right Stillness.<sup>[5]</sup>What should we do about it? 'This Noble Eightfold Path – the way leading to the cessation of suffering – is to be developed.'<sup>[6]</sup>The Buddha could say: 'This Noble Eightfold Path – the way leading to the cessation of suffering – has been developed.'

### **Awakening**

Now, in regard to these things unheard before in this generation, there arose in me insight, penetration, wisdom, true knowledge, and light.

So long as my penetration by insight into these Four Noble Truths as they really are was not thoroughly complete (that is, all three phases of each Truth), I did not claim to have awakened to unsurpassed perfect enlightenment in this world.

But when my penetration by insight into these Four Noble Truths as they really are was thoroughly complete, then I claimed to have awakened to unsurpassed perfect enlightenment in this world.

The penetration by insight arose in me: 'This liberation of mind is unshakable. This is the last birth. Now there is no more renewed existence.'

### **The Turning of the Wheel**

This is what the Buddha said.<sup>[7]</sup>Elated, the group of five bhikkhus delighted in the Buddha's teaching.

And while this discourse was being spoken, there arose in the Venerable Kondañña the dust-free, stainless vision of the Dhamma: "Whatever is subject to origination, all that is subject to cessation."<sup>[8]</sup>(He became a stream-winner – and that proved that the Dhamma could be taught, setting in motion the Wheel of the Dhamma.)

And when the Wheel of the Dhamma had been set in motion by the Buddha, the heavenly beings raised a cry: "At Benares, in the Deer Park at Isipatana, the unsurpassed Wheel of the Dhamma has been set in motion by the Buddha, which cannot be stopped by anyone in the world or the heavens."

Thus at that moment, at that instant, at that second, the news spread as far as the Brahma world, and this ten thousandfold world system shook, quaked, and trembled, and an immeasurable glorious radiance appeared in the world, surpassing the divine majesty of the heavenly beings. Then the Buddha exclaimed: "Koṇḍañña has indeed understood! Koṇḍañña has indeed understood!"

In this way the Venerable Koṇḍañña acquired the name 'Añña Koṇḍañña' – Koṇḍañña Who Has Understood.